SILK ROUTES LIMITED · REFERENCE EDITION

The Garment Manufacturing Glossary

117 trade terms explained, A to Z

The vocabulary a factory uses every day, written for the brands and designers who have to work with it. No jargon left unexplained.

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UK clothing manufacturer since 2008

How to use this glossary

Garment manufacturing has its own working vocabulary, and most of it is never explained to the people commissioning the work. A factory will use twenty of these terms in a single email and assume all of them are understood.

That assumption costs money. A brand that nods through a conversation about lay plans, shade bands and gold seals ends up approving things it did not follow.

This glossary covers the terms that actually come up in production correspondence, written plainly. Where a term has a common misunderstanding attached, that is noted too.

What this is not

It is not exhaustive. Specialist sectors — knitwear, technical outerwear, tailoring — carry their own vocabulary beyond this list.

It also contains no prices, no lead times and no minimum quantities. Those depend entirely on garment, fabric, quantity and timing, and any figure printed here would be wrong for most readers.

Where usage varies between factories and regions, the definition given is the one most common in UK and European production.

A note on reading a quote. Most confusion between a brand and a factory traces back to four terms: **CMT**, **FOB**, **full package** and **MOQ**. If you read only four entries in this glossary, read those.

Where these terms come up

At enquiry

MOQ · CMT · FOB · full package · lead time · unit cost

The vocabulary of the first conversation. Getting these wrong makes every later discussion harder.

At specification

tech pack · BOM · POM · tolerance · seam allowance · block · grading

The language of the document the factory manufactures from.

At sampling

proto · fit sample · SMS · PP sample · gold seal · lab dip · shade band

The approval sequence. Each term names a decision someone has to sign.

At production

marker · lay · bundle · SPI · inline inspection · critical path · size ratio

What the factory floor is actually doing while you wait.

The glossary that follows runs A to Z. If you are reading it before a first enquiry, the four entries named above are the ones that will save you the most time.

A

Appliqué
A shaped piece of fabric stitched onto the surface of a garment as decoration. Adds an operation and therefore cost.

Armhole
The opening the sleeve is set into. Measured as a curve, not a straight line, so specify which method you are using.

Assortment
The mix of sizes and colours making up an order. A total quantity without an assortment cannot be costed or cut.

B

Backstitch
A reverse stitch at the start and end of a seam to lock it. Its absence is a common cause of seam failure in cheap production.

Bar tack
A dense cluster of stitches reinforcing a stress point such as a pocket corner or belt loop.

Basting
A long temporary stitch used to hold pieces together during fitting, removed afterwards.

Bias
The 45-degree diagonal of a woven fabric, where it stretches most. Bias-cut garments drape differently and waste more fabric.

Binding
A narrow strip of fabric enclosing a raw edge. Used at necklines, armholes and hems.

Bill of Materials (BOM)
The complete list of every component in a garment with supplier, reference and consumption. Part of the tech pack.

Blind hem
A hem stitched so the thread is almost invisible from the outside.

Block
A base pattern representing a brand's standard fit, from which individual styles are developed. Carrying blocks forward reduces pattern cost season to season.

Bulk production
The main manufacturing run, as distinct from sampling. Begins only after the pre-production sample is approved.

Bundle
A tied group of cut pieces moved together through the sewing line.

C

Care label
The sewn-in label carrying washing and care instructions. Content requirements vary by market.

Colourway
One colour combination of a style. Each colourway typically carries its own minimum.

Composition
The fibre content of a fabric, expressed as percentages. Affects handle, cost, care and labelling.

Contrast stitch
Topstitching in a deliberately different colour from the fabric. Requires its own thread reference in the BOM.

Cover stitch
A stitch producing two or more parallel rows on the face and a looped finish underneath. Standard on jersey hems.

CMT
Cut, Make, Trim. The factory sews the garment; the brand supplies fabric and trims. Lower quoted price, but the brand carries sourcing risk.

Critical path
The dated schedule of every approval and milestone from tech pack to delivery. Missing one date usually moves the delivery date.

Cuff
The finished end of a sleeve or trouser leg.

Cutting table
The surface on which fabric is laid and cut. Its length limits how long a lay can be, which affects cutting efficiency.

D

Dart
A folded and stitched wedge that shapes flat fabric to the body.

Denier
A measure of fibre thickness, most often used for synthetics and linings. Higher denier means a heavier yarn.

Digital printing
Printing directly onto fabric from a digital file. Economical for short runs and complex artwork; slower per metre than screen printing at volume.

Dobby
A woven fabric with small geometric patterns produced on the loom rather than printed.

Drape
How a fabric falls under its own weight. Cannot be judged from a photograph — always assess physically.

Drop shoulder
A shoulder seam positioned below the natural shoulder point.

DTG
Direct-to-garment printing. Prints onto a finished garment rather than fabric. Suits very short runs and full-colour artwork.

Dye lot
A single batch of fabric dyed together. Different lots of the same colour can vary visibly — see shade band.

E

Ease
The difference between body measurement and garment measurement. Wearing ease allows movement; design ease creates the intended silhouette.

Edge stitch
Topstitching worked very close to a seam or fold, typically within 2mm.

Embroidery
Stitched decoration. Priced by stitch count, not by area, so dense small logos can cost more than large sparse ones.

End use
What the garment is for. Determines which fabric performance tests are relevant.

F

Fabric consumption
How much fabric one garment uses, including waste in the lay. The single largest variable in most unit costs.

Facing
A shaped piece of fabric finishing a raw edge on the inside, common at necklines and front openings.

Fastness
A fabric's resistance to colour loss under washing, rubbing, light or perspiration. Tested before bulk.

Fit sample
A sample made to check measurement against the specification. Made in bulk or bulk-equivalent fabric, unlike the proto.

Flat lock
A flat seam with no bulk, used where a raised seam would irritate the skin. Common in activewear.

FOB
Free On Board. The factory sources materials and delivers the finished goods to a named port. Price includes materials and making but not onward freight or duty.

Full package
The factory handles sourcing, production and finishing, delivering finished goods. Simplest for the brand; least visibility into component cost.

Fusing
Bonding an interlining to fabric with heat to add structure, typically at collars, cuffs and plackets.

G

Gauge
The number of needles per inch on a knitting machine. Finer gauge means a finer knit.

Gold seal
The approved sample sealed by both parties as the standard for bulk. Delivered goods are judged against it.

Grading
Scaling the base pattern across the size range. Increments may be consistent or vary by measurement point.

Grain line
The direction of the warp threads. Cutting off grain causes twisting and unstable fit.

GSM
Grams per square metre. The standard measure of fabric weight.

Gusset
A shaped panel inserted to add movement, commonly at the underarm or crotch.

H

Hand feel
The tactile quality of a fabric. Subjective, and the main reason physical samples cannot be replaced by images.

Hem
The finished lower edge of a garment or sleeve.

HPS
High Point Shoulder. The highest point of the shoulder seam at the neck, used as the origin for most vertical measurements.

I

Inline inspection
Quality checking carried out during sewing rather than after. Catches systematic faults before the whole order is affected.

Interfacing
Material added between layers to give structure or stability. May be fusible or sewn in.

Interlock
A double-knit jersey, smooth on both faces and more stable than single jersey.

J

Jersey
A knitted fabric with a smooth face and looped back. The base cloth of most t-shirts.

Jacquard
A fabric with a pattern woven or knitted into its structure rather than applied to the surface.

K

Knit down
A small knitted swatch produced to confirm yarn, gauge and stitch before a full knitwear sample.

Knock-off
A copy of an existing garment. Requesting one exposes both brand and factory to intellectual property risk.

L

Lab dip
A small fabric swatch dyed to match a target colour, submitted for approval before bulk dyeing.

Lay
The stacked layers of fabric prepared for cutting. Longer lays cut more efficiently, which is one reason larger orders cost less per unit.

Lead time
The elapsed time from order confirmation to delivery. Distinct from production time, which excludes sourcing and approvals.

Lining
An inner fabric layer finishing the inside of a garment.

Lockstitch
The standard two-thread sewing machine stitch. Secure but with little stretch.

M

Marker
The cutting plan showing how pattern pieces are arranged on the fabric. A well-planned marker directly reduces fabric cost.

Merchandiser
The factory-side contact who coordinates an order from enquiry to delivery. Usually the brand's single point of contact.

MOQ
Minimum Order Quantity. May apply per style, per colourway, per size or per fabric — always ask which.

Mock-up
A rough garment made to test a construction idea, not intended to represent finished quality.

N

Nap
A raised fibre surface with a direction, as on velvet or corduroy. All pieces must be cut the same way, which increases consumption.

Notch
A small mark cut into a pattern edge to align pieces accurately during sewing.

NDA
Non-Disclosure Agreement. Signed before sharing designs or specifications with a prospective manufacturer.

O

Overlock
A stitch that trims and encloses a raw edge in one pass. Also called serging.

Open width
Fabric supplied flat rather than folded or tubular.

Operations
The individual sewing steps in a garment. Operation count, more than fabric, drives making cost.

P

Pattern
The set of shaped templates from which a garment is cut. The first pattern is the base for all later grading.

Piece dyeing
Dyeing fabric before cutting, as opposed to garment dyeing after making.

Pilling
Small balls of fibre forming on a fabric surface with wear. Tested for before bulk on knitwear and jersey.

Placket
The finished opening at a neckline, cuff or front, usually carrying buttons.

Ply
One layer of fabric in a lay, or the number of yarns twisted together.

POM
Point of Measure. A defined location on the garment where a measurement is taken, with its own tolerance.

PP sample
Pre-Production sample. Made on the bulk line in bulk fabric with bulk trims. The last check before production.

Pre-shrink
Treating fabric to remove shrinkage before cutting, so finished garments hold their measurements after washing.

Proto sample
The first physical garment, made to check shape and construction. Not a fit sample and should not be measured for size.

Q

QC
Quality Control. The inspection activity itself — checking goods against the standard.

Quality assurance
The system that prevents faults occurring, as distinct from QC which detects them.

R

Reactive dye
A dye that bonds chemically with the fibre, giving strong wash fastness on cellulosic fabrics such as cotton.

Repeat
The distance before a printed or woven pattern begins again. Large repeats increase fabric consumption.

Rib
A knitted structure with vertical ridges and natural stretch. Used at cuffs, hems and necklines.

Roll
A single continuous length of fabric as supplied by the mill. Minimum purchase is often a full roll, which is one constraint on short runs.

S

Salesman sample
A sample made for showing to buyers ahead of production. See SMS.

Sample size
The single size in which samples are made and the pattern is cut. All specification measurements refer to it.

Seam allowance
The fabric between the stitch line and the raw edge. Must be stated in the spec; it affects finished measurements.

Selvedge
The finished self-edge running down both sides of a woven fabric.

Shade band
A set of approved fabric samples showing the acceptable range of colour variation across dye lots.

Shrinkage
Dimensional change after washing. Tested before cutting — shrinkage discovered afterwards cannot be corrected.

Size ratio
The proportion of each size within a pack or carton, for example 1:2:2:1.

SMS
Sales Man Sample. Made in correct fabric and colour for showing to buyers, ahead of bulk.

SPI
Stitches Per Inch. A measure of stitch density. Higher SPI is generally stronger and slower to sew.

Spec sheet
The measurement table within a tech pack, listing every point of measure with its target and tolerance.

Stitch density
How closely stitches are placed. Affects seam strength, appearance and sewing time.

T

Tech pack
The complete specification a factory manufactures from: sketches, BOM, measurements, construction, labelling and packing.

Tension
The tightness of thread in a stitch. Incorrect tension causes puckering or seam failure.

Tolerance
The permitted deviation from a specified measurement. A specification without tolerances cannot be enforced.

Top stitch
Visible stitching on the face of a garment, decorative or structural.

Trims
Every component that is not the main fabric — buttons, zips, labels, elastic, thread, interlining.

Twill
A weave producing diagonal lines on the face. Denim and chino cloth are twills.

U

Under-pressing
Pressing carried out during construction rather than only at the end. Largely determines how sharp a finished garment looks.

Unit cost
The price per garment. Meaningful only alongside the terms it is quoted under — CMT, FOB or full package.

V

Vent
A finished slit allowing movement, typically at a jacket hem or cuff.

Vat dye
A dye class known for strong fastness, historically associated with indigo and denim.

W

Warp
The threads running the length of a woven fabric, parallel to the selvedge.

Weft
The threads running across a woven fabric, perpendicular to the warp.

Wash test
A controlled laundering test checking shrinkage, colour loss and appearance retention.

Woven
Fabric made by interlacing warp and weft. Stable, with little stretch unless elastane is present.

Y

Yarn count
A measure of yarn fineness. Conventions differ by fibre, so always confirm which system is being used.

Yoke
A shaped panel across the shoulders or hip that carries the fabric below it.

Z

Zip tape
The fabric band a zip's teeth are attached to. Its colour and width are specified separately from the zip itself.

Zig-zag
A stitch that moves side to side, giving stretch. Used on elastic and knitwear.

Quick reference

The sample stages, in order

STAGE	WHAT IT IS	NOTE
Proto	Shape and construction. Any available fabric.	*Not measured for fit*
Fit	Measurement against the spec. Bulk-equivalent fabric.	*Two to three rounds typical*
SMS	Correct fabric and colour, for showing to buyers.	*Ahead of bulk*
Pre-production	Bulk line, bulk fabric, bulk trims.	*Last check before production*
Gold seal	The approved PP sample, sealed by both parties.	*The standard for delivery*

Three terms most often confused

CMT

You supply fabric and trims. The factory cuts, makes and trims. Lowest quoted price, highest sourcing burden on you.

FOB

The factory sources everything and delivers to a named port. One price, less visibility into components.

Full package

The factory handles sourcing, production and finishing, delivering finished goods. Simplest to manage, least granular to negotiate.

Where these terms appear in practice, the difference between a smooth order and an expensive one is usually whether both sides meant the same thing by them.

Six terms worth confirming in writing

TERM	WHAT TO CONFIRM
MOQ	Per style, per colourway, per size or per fabric — the answer differs by factory.
Tolerance	A measurement with no tolerance cannot be enforced at inspection.
Sample size	Every spec measurement refers to it. Confirm which size the pattern is cut in.
Shade band	The agreed range of acceptable colour variation between dye lots.
Size ratio	The size split per carton. A total quantity alone cannot be packed.
Gold seal	Who holds it, and how long it is retained after delivery.

SILK ROUTES LIMITED

If a term here came up in a quote you did not follow — ask us.

We are a UK clothing manufacturer working with new and established brands across cut-and-sew, CMT and full-package production — from first sample through to repeat bulk orders. Questions about a quote are welcome before you commit to it, not only after.

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